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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001620

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SISTANI CONFIDANTE URGES HELP FOR PM-DESIGNATE
MALIKI AGAINST POLITICAL PARTY ENCROACHMENT.

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: In a May 11 conversation with PolCouns, Najaf cleric Emad Kalanter told PolCouns that Muqtada al-Sadr sees the benefits of participating in the political process, and will not attack Coalition Forces. Kalanter argued that Shia militias could not be dissolved while the Sunni Arab-dominated insurgency raged on because many Shia feel militias protect them from insurgent groups. Kalanter also argued that Provincial Reconstruction Teams should engage local Iraqis as well as provincial government officials if they hope to rebuild Iraq because provincial governments are corrupt and ineffective. He then suggested Coalition Forces should set up Internet cafes and a periodical to gets its message to educated Iraqis. End Summary.

12. (C) Najaf cleric Emad Kalanter, who is related by marriage to both Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr and who operates religious schools in Najaf, told PolCouns May 11 that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki was having a hard time naming his cabinet because the political parties were so insistent on determining the names of ministers. Kalanter said Maliki has told the Najaf clerics that he can decide "even ten percent" of the cabinet, and he urged the U.S. to help the Prime Minister-designate. PolCouns underlined our strong desire that Maliki and his government succeed in reestablishing security throughout Iraq and advance the reconstruction of Iraq. He told Kalanter that if Maliki were to act strongly, we would be supportive. It was also important, he underlined, that the government have broad national support. Kalanter agreed but worried that the cabinet formation process was taking too long.

Muqtada al-Sadr and Militias

13. (C) Kalanter also said that Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) will not attack Coalition Forces (CF). Kalanter said that any plan to dissolve militias must deal with Shia militias as well as Sunni Arab armed groups. Many Shia, Kalanter argued, see a value in having armed Shia militias as long as the Sunni Arab armed groups are a lethal threat to ordinary Shia citizens. Kalanter said that is why Grand Ayatollah Sistani issued a statement saying that all weapons should be in the hands of the GOI: Sunni and Shia groups must be disarmed. Kalanter said focusing the disarmament process on Shia militias exclusively would simply produce a Shia backlash. He also added that dissolving JAM would prove difficult because Muqtada al-Sadr does not fully control it. PolCouns emphasized that the problem of

armed gangs, Sunni and Shia, had to be a priority item for the next government in collaboration with Coalition Forces and the Embassy.

On Provincial Reconstruction Teams

14. (C) Kalanter had not heard of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) initiative but said the PRTs should work with a wide array of local contacts and not just the provincial governors and provincial councils (PC). He said the PCs are a good idea, but characterized the current ones as corrupt, ineffective, and useless; Iraqis in their long history have never seen legislatures truly interested in the interests of their constituents, he cautioned. Now that Iraq's political parties have taken control of the PCs, they do not respond to the needs of the people and have caused many problems. Kalanter urged that PRTs reach out to civil society, businesses and "educated people" to ensure that people understand how reconstruction at the provincial level can move forward.

Internet Cafes and Hi Magazine

15. (C) Kalanter suggested to PolCouns that the U.S. should open up Internet cafes and other fora to expose Iraqis to outside thinking and help educated people share ideas. He noted that he had seen the State Department's "Hi" magazine and he praised it as something attractive that needed to be circulated more widely in Iraq. He cautioned that the magazine should not be advertised as

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an American-sponsored magazine, because it would then be seen as biased. These media ventures would help the U.S. get its message to the people, he said.

Comment

16. (C) Comment: There is an element of truth to Kalanter's claim that much of the support for Shia militias stems from fear of Sunni Arab-dominated insurgent and terrorist groups. However, we cannot accept his argument that militias not be dissolved until the insurgency is ended. Such thinking overlooks the damage that the former do to establishment of rule of law in Iraq and the ultimate ability of an Iraqi government to provide for the security of all its citizens. We were a little surprised that he praised "Hi" magazine - not exactly the kind of publication we would have thought would appeal to the Najaf clerical establishment. Kalanter considers himself a man of ideas, and like some other Iraqi scholars clearly wants to find opportunities to engage with the West on the level of ideas.

KHALILZAD